

Work ability and need for recovery in a public sector population

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Aim

This study aimed to explore the relationship of need for recovery after work (NFR) and organizational social capital (OSC) and with the presence of poor work ability (WA) in an ageing public sector population.

Methods

1457 subjects (79.0% response rate), working in 7 public administrations participated in a cross-sectional questionnaire study. For the present analyses supervisors and work units with <5 workers were excluded, resulting in a study population of 1268 subjects, spread over 78 work units (5-80 workers).

Work ability was assessed by the short version of the Work Ability Index (WAI; 7–49 scale). Poor work ability (WAI<37) was used as outcome variable.

NFR was assessed by the NFR scale questionnaire (0–100 scale). High need for recovery (NFR>45) was used as independent variable. OSC was assessed by an OSC scale (0–10) derived from relevant dimensions of the second version of the Copenhagen psychosocial questionnaire (vertical trust, justice and respect, social community at work). Associations of OSC and NFR with the prevalence of poor work ability were explored by multivariate logistic regression analysis, correcting for age, gender, occupation (executive / blue collar / white collar) and shift work. OSC was entered separately as individually experienced OSC and as mean OSC per work unit. Analyses were performed separately for the total population, older (≥45yr) and younger (<45yr) workers.

Results

The prevalence of poor WA in the total study population was 12.0%; 10.0% in the younger workers and 14.2% in the older workers.

A high NFR was strongly associated with poor WA; the associations were larger in younger workers (OR up to 7.66).

The individual experienced OSC was a significant factor both in younger (OR 0.69) and older workers (OR 0.72).

Work unit OSC was important in younger workers (OR 0.50) and not significant in older workers.

Age was an additional factor in older workers group.

Conclusions

The strong associations of OSC and NFR with poor work ability is suggestive of the important role of OSC and NFR in maintaining work ability.